

The Island of Hope & Blue Pacific Thinking Climate Change, Geopolitics and Oceanic Visions

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Dispuut Eo Sensu, Dutch United Nations Student Association, University of Groningen
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Greetings from St Andrews! In these difficult, sad and uncertain times, I trust you are all staying safe & I'm so sorry that we cannot meet up and be together in person. We have to hope that such visits will become possible again in the not too distant future, though for the moment St Andrews and Groningen feel as remote and as close as Europe and the Pacific, and as ever we can learn from Pacific peoples for whom distances and vast ocean waters have never been a barrier to social relations.

Let me reiterate my appreciation of Dispuut Eo Sensu's kind invitation and interest in my work, and gratitude to Kondwani Mkorongo whose invitation arrived just at the point where we in Scotland needed a reminder of our place in Europe just as many elsewhere in the UK were looking forward to Brexit which in these few short weeks now seems so other worldly and evermore nonsensical. European and Pacific cooperation and research collaborations have been vital to my academic work over the last decade, and have informed the positions I take in my work. I have been asking colleagues in St Andrews with some experience of what a 'Dispuut' is, and clearly I'm missing out as the format and meetings sound great fun and lively. I was hoping to learn from and borrow your idea for St Andrews!

I thought it would be easiest all round if I simply sent you through some audio-visual, video and reading links to my research on two inter-connected home-grown Pacific ideas - 'The Island of Hope', and 'The Blue Pacific' - which speak powerfully to global inter-connectedness through climate change and our shared atmosphere, and which set out a Pacific vision for environmental, social and geopolitical relations.

I hope the inter-connections between the work and resources become obvious:

1. Here's a link to a lecture audio slide presentation, 'The Island of Hope': https://youtu.be/lxhxWi_Lxgc

2. 'The Island of Hope' presentation has a focus on Samoa & refers to the then Head of State, His Highness Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi - who wrote this powerful 'Prelude: Climate Change and the Perspective of the Fish', in a 2018 open access book I edited with Peter Rudiak-Gould - *Pacific Climate Cultures: Living Climate Change in Oceania*, <https://www.degruyter.com/view/books/9783110591415/9783110591415-001/9783110591415-001.xml>

3. The Introduction to *Pacific Climate Cultures: Living Climate Change in Oceania* also touches on 'The Island of Hope' and 'The Blue Pacific', <https://www.degruyter.com/view/product/502004>

4. Here's a link to a video of His Highness Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi receiving an Honorary Doctorate at the University of St Andrews last year, and includes my laureation address which also shows how Tui Atua has been central to the Pacific's response to climate change and international relations, <https://youtu.be/PKYjqxw0ncg>

5. Here's a link to a short paper I wrote on the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 8 moon mission which also provides an alternative Pacific holistic vision of inter-connectedness on Earth, 'Earthrise +50: Apollo 8, Mead, Gore and Gaia', <https://www.dropbox.com/s/0ywpzsii4bjavkk/at-earthrise-tc.pdf?dl=0>

6. For anyone wanting more on the geopolitical and academic background, here's a few thoughts:

'In the midst of increasing geopolitical competition in Oceania, Pacific Island countries are pushing back on the dominant narratives that powerful countries use to frame how the region fits into their global agendas. Central to this resistance is the 'Blue Pacific' narrative, which the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) endorsed in 2017. It provides both a culturally and politically empowering narrative for Pacific regionalism, and a strategy for assertive diplomacy to counter the dominance of global powers: most significantly, the 'new Cold War' between China's Maritime Silk Road (MSR) extension of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and the 'Indo-Pacific' strategy of the United States and its allies (Kabutaulaka, forthcoming; Wesley-Smith and Kabutaulaka, 2019).

Each of these geopolitical strategies seek to draw the Pacific into competing spheres of influence that share a common focus on upgrading maritime infrastructure and securing trading corridors that reach from the Pacific across the Indian Ocean to the east coast of Africa. China has a long presence in the Pacific (see Crocombe 2007), and may soon overtake Australia as the region's dominant donor (Lowy Pacific aid map 2018). The recent progress of China's land-based BRI and maritime-based MSR initiatives have drawn responses and increased investments from the US and its allies: e.g. US' 'Asia-Pacific Pivot' & 'Indo-Pacific'; Australia's 'Pacific Step Up'; Indonesia's 'Pacific Engagement'; Japan's 'Indo-Pacific'; New Zealand's 'Pacific Reset'; and the UK's 'Pacific Uplift'. Ambitions for such vast geopolitical reaches concern trade, natural resources, infrastructure, development and political influence tied to international forum voting rights - as much in the Pacific and African zones as along the corridors for countries such as India.

Significantly here, Kabutaulaka also argues here that the climate emergency is the Pacific's paramount security threat, rather than these competing geopolitical visions - and points out that the US withdrawal from the UN Paris Agreement, together with Australia's, China's, India's and Japan's increasing use of coal means that the 'Blue Pacific' positions the region in opposition to these international partners. Furthermore, he notes that the EU's climate leadership is in strong contrast and represents an advantageous geopolitical resource.

Set against these geopolitical visions, the last decade has seen a series of challenges to the Pacific's regional governance architecture: e.g. the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF, Tarte 2013) and the replacement of the 2005 Pacific Plan's aspirations towards political union with the 2014 sustainable development and climate-focused Framework for Pacific Regionalism (FPR) (Maclellan 2015, 2018; Paskal 2018), which together accelerated a 'fundamental' new 'paradigm shift' in the way a 'new Pacific diplomacy' is engaging

international relations on its own terms (Borrevik & Crook et al 2014; Fry & Tarte 2015; Tong 2015). These developments culminated in the 2017 Pacific Islands Forum meeting in Samoa adopted its own vision, *The Blue Pacific: Our Sea of Islands*:

“The Blue Pacific as being about all Pacific peoples comprising our ocean of islands, who recognise their needs and potential, who plan and own their development agenda, and who can act collectively for the good of all, rather than a few. The Blue Pacific is the catalyst for deeper Pacific regionalism”. Forty-Eighth PIF Communiqué

In Oceania, the notion of ‘Blue Pacific’ foregrounds the defining importance of the Pacific ocean as a shared continent. It recognisably draws from a recent history of ‘life-centred’ views in which the ‘land, the sea and people are integral parts of one entity’ and involving a navigational quest towards an ‘Island of Hope’ (WCC 2001): this imagery of voyaging is epitomised by the symbolic importance of the Polynesian Voyaging Society’s Hōkūle‘a craft, and was strikingly evident at the 2014 UN SIDS conference (Crook 2016) which launched the SAMOA Pathway outcome agreement - international partnerships as paddlers under Pacific captaincy - as ‘a great Samoan Va’a’ double-hulled voyaging canoe: it was equally forceful at the 2017 COP23 climate conference in Bonn where the Fijian hosts installed a voyaging canoe and told the world that ‘We are all in the same canoe’. These ideas also clearly emerge from a genealogy of Pacific decolonisation thinking reaching back through Hau’ofa’s ‘Our Sea of Islands’ (1994) and they share with Narakobi’s ‘Melanesian Way’ (1980; Otto 1997) a similar cultural synthesis which resists any reduction to a simple definition but rather involves a cultural and political nexus that external actors and interventions continue to misunderstand (Fry & Kabutaulaka 2008; and see Crook 2007).’

I hope these links and resources provide an insight into my research and collaborations, and manage to convey Pacific ideas and concerns crystallised through ‘The Island of Hope’ and ‘The Blue Pacific’. I also hope that these can stand for my appreciation of your kind invitation and in reciprocity of a kind, although as we’re all discovering, on-line is a poor substitute for in-person. Stay well and safe.